

CHAPTER I

ANCESTRY

What a famous man believes as to his remote ancestral origins is often of more import than the dry, literal truth, and it will be best, therefore, to begin with the story of the Disraelis as it shaped itself in the mind of the subject of these memoirs.

There have been two great colonies of the Jewish race in Europe — in Spain and in Sarmatia. The origin of the Jews in Spain is lost in the night of time. That it was of great antiquity we have proof. The tradition, never derided, that the Iberian Jews were a Phoenician colony has been favoured by the researches of modern antiquaries, who have traced the Hebrew language in the ancient names of the localities. . . . We know that in the time of Cicero the Jews had been settled immemorially in Spain. When the Romans, converted to Christianity and acted on by the priesthood, began to trouble the Spanish Jews, it appears by a decree of Constantine that they were owners and cultivators of the soil, a circumstance which alone proves the antiquity and the nobility of their settlement, for the possession of the land is never conceded to a degraded race. The